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Mediation and Meditation
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In an essay entitled “Mindfulness, Meditation and Mediation: Where the Transcendent Meets the Familiar,” Daniel Bowling explores how meditation can help mediators develop personal qualities that will enhance the ability to bring peace into the room. Mr. Bowling is on to something very important.

Mediation is often very difficult work. As mediators, we are called upon to help resolve conflicts that often seem intractable and sometimes involve destructive emotions or even physical violence. To do this work, we must stay calm and grounded. If we are to help heal the parties and the situation, we must be detached, fully awake, open and present. We also need the ability to stay flexible and move in any direction. Meditation is a tool for developing these qualities.

There is ample scientific evidence demonstrating the positive effects of meditation and other contemplative practices (such as yoga and qigong) on the human body. Among other things, there is substantial research that proves that meditation induces what Herbert Benson, MD calls the “relaxation response.” Few scientists now doubt that these practices decrease stress hormones, blood pressure and pulse rate.

However, meditation does more than simply improve physical health. It has been reported that meditation increases the tranquility of the mind, improves perceptual abilities, and promotes a detached neutrality. Most significantly for mediators, Western science has now confirmed that meditation has the ability to transform destructive emotions. For example, by using devices that image the brain during meditation, Dr. Richard Davidson of the University of Wisconsin has found that people who practice meditation become calmer, happier, more loving and less prone to destructive emotions. Moreover, one does not have to be a monk (or even a Buddhist) to benefit from practicing meditation. To the contrary, Dr. Davidson’s research has indicated that meditation is very helpful for ordinary people, and that the parts of the brain that help to form positive emotions become increasingly active after only eight weeks of meditation.

The question then becomes – what are we as mediators to do with the information that meditation has the ability to transform negative emotions? Clearly Mr. Bowling is correct when he asserts that mediators should use meditation to help develop their personal qualities. However, in addition to using meditation to develop our own qualities, we should consider whether it would be appropriate to encourage the parties embroiled in the conflict to meditate. The answer to this question depends on our view of the role of the mediator.

Biography

Linda Lazarus is a mediator, trainer and lawyer in private practice in the District of Columbia. Ms. Lazarus is listed in the most recent edition of Who's Who in American Law and also teaches yoga, qigong and meditation at Gold's Gym.
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